

ICPS newsletter®

European Union should open door to Ukraine membership, says PASOS

The PASOS network has called on the EU to convene an EU–Ukraine summit to agree technical and financial assistance to strengthen transparency and rule of law in Ukraine, and to reject Cold War spheres of influence in determining future relations with Kyiv. That message was sent last week to EU governments, the European Parliament and the European Commission by the 23 policy centres, including ICPS, that make up the Policy Association for an Open Society

The EU played a major role in defending democracy in Ukraine

Diplomatic efforts in Kyiv in the final weeks of 2004 demonstrated that the European Union really is capable of formulating and implementing a common foreign policy—at the very least on its eastern border. By responding promptly and significantly to the vote-rigging and abuse of democratic procedures in its near abroad, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to the founding values of democracy and equity and rejected a “short-termist” approach to regional politics. As a network of 23 independent policy centres from 17 different countries in Europe and Central Asia, PASOS welcomes the success of this mediation, which paved the way to a re-run of the presidential election run-off in Ukraine on 26 December.

The changes taking place in Ukraine are in no small part a result of the enlargement of the EU to the country's borders since Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, together with seven other countries, became the newest Union members in May 2004. The prominent role played by the presidents of Poland and Lithuania, two new EU members, in negotiating a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis in Ukraine saw the EU demonstrating a new pro-active approach. Combined with the diplomacy of the EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, this dynamic engagement signalled a stronger commitment to supporting democratic processes in the neighboring country.

This new diplomatic initiative is welcomed most by new EU members who

share Ukraine's experience of a recent past under authoritarian communist rule.

Changes in Ukraine should encourage the EU to review its policies

PASOS members believe that events in Kyiv reinforced a common conviction in the importance of sharing the lessons of our histories and applying core values of democracy, equity and pluralism to our foreign policy. It is only through such an approach that we can ensure that no country's freedom and sovereignty are held back by the old Cold War mentality, where the hegemony of one overrode the national self-determination of many.

It is now crucial that the EU sustain its interest in the welfare of Ukraine, its largest neighbor, after Russia and Turkey. Just as a date was set last month to launch membership talks with Turkey, opening the door to Ukraine's eventual membership would send an important signal to Ukrainians that their courageous and determined fight for a fair election has been welcomed with open arms by their EU neighbors.

We call on EU Member States and EU institutions to offer a credible and ambitious policy package to Ukraine in recognition of its citizens' demonstrated commitment to core European values and the country's pivotal role in maintaining stability in eastern Europe. Current EU proposals such as the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement, the EU Action Plan and its Neighborhood Policy fall short for lack of focus and do not suitably acknowledge Ukraine's rapid evolution

away from post-soviet “controlled democracy” towards a genuinely pluralistic system and closer to European political models.

To avoid the risk of sending a misleading signal to the EU's other neighbors, EU institutions should pursue a differentiated neighborhood policy, based on maximum openness to change in each qualifying country. Clearly, interest in Ukraine in pushing reforms ahead now sets the country apart from another neighbor, Belarus, so the EU framework for relations with the two states should not remain as it is. Making the policy offer responsive to the current needs of neighboring countries is the first step towards acknowledging the positive change in Ukraine.

The EU must provide a rapid response and assistance to Ukraine

The EU must be able to adapt to changed circumstances in neighboring countries. Back in the historic 1989, the PHARE programme was quickly introduced to support transition in Poland and Hungary, and rapidly extended to all the states that were setting out on the path of transition to democracy and a market economy. Many of the member institutes of PASOS are located in countries that benefited from this initiative and whose people remember well the decisive support the EU extended to their fledgling democracies. We are all the more aware of the urgent need to use positive momentum for reforms before the inevitable period of demobilization and fatigue sets in, eventually slowing down or even reversing early gains. For this reason, we call on all interested EU member states and the European Commission to convene an EU–Ukraine summit at the earliest possible date. At such a summit, the priorities of EU financial assistance should be agreed upon jointly.

Technical assistance and support to budding democratic institutions in Ukraine presupposes transparency and the rule of law, which can be achieved if the country's determination to be recognised as a working market economy and to accede to the World Trade Organisation is reinforced. Moreover, the popular character of the peaceful Ukrainian "revolution" places greater demands on European policy-makers. A state of 47 million on the doorstep of an enlarged EU will not be drawn closer to Europe if all that is done is to tweak the current policy widely perceived by Ukrainians themselves as inadequate to their aspirations.

The transition experience of CEE states in the nineties demonstrated that the process of closer integration with other democracies and market economies is a strong anchor for reform. The EU-Ukraine summit should hold out the prospect of association with the EU as an open possibility and conclude with the commitment that the degree of integration will be dependent solely on Ukraine's own response. Such a declaration would require that the 2005-6 Ukraine Action Plan contain mechanisms for reviewing and assessing progress on key points in the jointly agreed agenda.

For the EU, Ukraine is not a "sphere of influence"

In the long term, EU institutions should upgrade the de facto status of Kyiv as a negotiating partner by adopting the principle that "all issues in EU-Ukraine relations are dealt with directly with the Ukrainian side," so that no prior consultations are conducted with third countries and the position of any third country cannot place conditions or limitations on the nature or substance of these relations. Ukrainian voters have demonstrated an impressive independence of mind and we should all respect it. The people of the newest EU member states remember well that one of the fundamental demands of all the 1989 revolutions was a clear abandonment of the concept of spheres of influence.

Ukrainian voters now expect a prompt and clear signal from the EU that their country is welcome into the European fold. Facilitating the travel of Ukrainians onto EU territory, and especially to the new

member states with whom they share multiple ties of history, culture and economy, would be one short-term measure of direct importance to the everyday lives of Ukrainian citizens. At the same time, the European Commission should spell out conditions and a timetable for the eventual lifting of visa requirements for Ukrainians who cross into EU territory.

The member institutes of PASOS are all convinced that an active eastern policy on the part of the EU should promote the core values of the Union within and among its neighboring states, including Russia. If based on mutual respect for sovereignty, Ukrainian-Russian relations will be in the direct interest of the entire

EU, given the interdependence of the enlarged EU, Ukraine and Russia in the areas of energy policy and migration. Russia's recent statements show that Moscow understands that Kyiv's progressive integration in European security, market and democratic structures would turn Ukraine into a valuable, reliable partner for Russia. The EU model of consensual trust-building, applied in southeastern Europe, could be of direct interest to our eastern neighbors. ■

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The PASOS network

The Policy Association for an Open Society or PASOS promotes and protects the values of an open society—democracy, rule of law, good governance, respect for and protection of human rights, and economic and social development—by supporting local policy centers.

PASOS members provide policy advice to Eastern European decision-makers and international organizations on issues as diverse as human rights, economic development, legal reform, management of public reforms, social policy, education, health, religion, international cooperation, small enterprise development, public participation, and public sector management.

The international donor community has recognized this expertise and the network has provided input to projects sponsored by the EU, UNDP, DFID, OSI and a host of international foundations and national governments.

PASOS comprises these think-tanks:

- Institute for Contemporary Studies (ICS), Albania
- Centre for Economic Development (CED), Bulgaria
- European Institute (EI), Bulgaria
- International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR), Bulgaria
- EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, Czech Republic
- PRAXIS Centre for Policy Studies, Estonia

- Institute for Policy Studies, Georgia
- Centre for Policy Studies, CEU (CPS), Hungary
- Public Policy Research Center (PPRC), Kazakhstan
- Providus Centre for Public Policy, Latvia
- EuroBalkan Institute, Republic of Macedonia
- Institute of Public Policy (IPP), Moldova
- Viitorul Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS), Moldova
- Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), Poland
- Center for Rural Assistance, Romania
- Center for Economic Policies, Romania
- Institute of Public Policy (IPP-Romania), Romania
- STRATEGIA St Petersburg Center for Humanities and Political Studies, Russian Federation
- Center for Legal Support to Local Government, Russian Federation
- Institute for Public Affairs (IVO), Slovakia
- Peace Institute, Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies, Slovenia
- International Centre for Policy Studies (ICPS), Ukraine
- LGI Development, United Kingdom.

For detailed information see http://lgi.osi.hu/documents.php?m_id=83

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